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*Published in:*

Global Discourse: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Current Affairs and Applied Contemporary Thought (Global Discourse)

*DOI:*

[10.1080/23269995.2017.1412619](https://doi.org/10.1080/23269995.2017.1412619)

*Publication date:*

2018

*Document Version*

Peer reviewed version

[Link to publication in Discovery Research Portal](#)

*Citation for published version (APA):*

Ezeokafor, E., & Kaunert, C. (2018). Securitization outside of the West: conceptualizing the securitization–neo-patrimonialism nexus in Africa. *Global Discourse: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Current Affairs and Applied Contemporary Thought (Global Discourse)*, 8(1), 83-99. <https://doi.org/10.1080/23269995.2017.1412619>

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# Securitization outside of the West: conceptualising the securitization-neopatrimonialism nexus in Africa

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## **Abstract:**

*Securitization is arguably the most successful theoretical framework to analyse security beyond the military confines with the nation state as the dominant actor within the international system. Amongst the critical voices, securitization has become the gold standard for analysing emerging challenges, such as migration, terrorism, human security, intra-state and cross-border issues, as well as environmental challenges. Yet, despite its broadening agenda, the framework has also been accused of a Western bias with a Western political context and democratic governance structure at its heart. This article aims to re-conceptualise the framework in a way that suits a non-Western context better, notably by re-conceptualising the securitization-neopatrimonialism nexus in Africa, which gives us significant new insights into non-Western political contexts. It analyses the securitization processes among the political elites in a neo-patrimonial statehood. It further stretches the conceptualisation of securitization into African statehood, characterised by a blurred line between the leader and the state.*

## **Introduction**

The most popular concepts in the discipline of International Relations and the debates thereof are deeply rooted in western (especially Europe and North America) historical and political epistemology. As the domain and scope of the discipline influences not much of other social science disciplines, rather it is constantly being influenced, it also lacks contextual dynamism. In other words, the IR discipline focuses more on European and North American political terrain without significantly accommodating socio-cultural variations of

other societies. This has therefore wrongly (we argue that it is overstated) earned the discipline of IR serious bashing as a failed intellectual project (Buzan and Little, 2001). The authors of that statement made a provocative and interesting statement which some people may perceive as going a little bit too far. Another reason for this unfriendly tagging of IR also arose from what has been explained as its Westphalian straitjacket; 'the strong tendency to assume that the model established in seventeenth century Europe should define what the international system is for all times and places'(Buzan and Little, 2001; 25).

The sub-discipline of security studies is not an exception in this intellectual parochialism – the Westphalian and Eurocentric bias in understanding security. From the realists (Morgenthau, 1965), to neo-realists (Watz, 1979) and the neo-liberals (Keohane, 1977, Nye, 1984), the focus of security debate remained on the place of state (a Westphalian contraption) in explaining the international security dynamics. The discussions coming from these various corners were anchored on certain historical or founding problematique created by the First World War, Second World Wars and the Cold War which were mainly European and Northern American creations. The intellectual world was fed with a realist perspective of security along the state-military-power line. While the neo-liberals differed a little, they still leaned towards the primacy of state as major actor and referent object in the security debate. The problem with this lies with the Westphalian understanding of state which does not appreciate other societies from other cultures at various stages of socio-political development. This narrow way of viewing global politics meant that even security studies was seen as strictly addressing issues of military power, national/state security paying little or no attention to emerging challenges such as migration, ethnic minorities, intra-state and cross-border security issues, human security challenges, environmental challenges and terrorism.

Shifting the goal post of security studies from that traditional standpoint eventually became 'something of a cottage industry' as observed by David Baldwin (1997; 5). There are now the critical security studies, emancipatory security, and Human security (Krause, 1997; Booth, 1991 and Kaldor, 2007) creating cacophony of voices over the same subject. It is apparent that one of the most popular and successful of these efforts has been the securitization theory of the Copenhagen School (Waever, 1995, Buzan et al, 1998, Buzan, 2003), which has generated a lot of commentaries and footnotes (Booth, 1991; 37). However, while Buzan and

Little accused the discipline of IR of Westphalian straitjacket, he and his other colleagues in the securitization project can be argued to have become guilty of the same bias (cf, Waever, 1995, Buzan et al, 1998 and Buzan and Waever, 2003). The idea of securitization was developed and applied consciously or unconsciously aimed at established political contexts and democracies of Europe. Even later works and commentaries on the subject of securitization were to considerable extent not significantly different (Huysmans, 1998, 2000; Balzacq, 2008; Karyotis and Patrikios, 2010; Leonard, 2010). To this effect, Claire Wilkinson (2007) questioned if securitization theory can be useful outside European security and political environment.

Can the securitization framework be rid of its Eurocentric parochialism in order to accommodate other security contexts and political structures? If we accept the general logic of securitization – that there is an existential threat, a securitizing actor, and an emergency action based on a specific rhetorical process and acquiescence by a given audience, how do we unpack and demarcate their boundaries in non-western security environment and political culture? The Copenhagen School rule is that ‘a discourse that takes the form of presenting something as an existential threat to a referent object does not by itself create securitization; that is the securitizing move, but the issue is securitized only if and when the audience accepts it as such’ (Buzan et al, 1998; 25). This is about the only discussion on audience in the framework – an important element of the securitization process. To this effect, Leonard and Kaunert (2011) have made the argument that the idea of audience has been under-theorised. Vuori (2008) also argued that even in military regimes outside the usual established democracies, military leaders require and do have audiences to carry out the process of securitizing threats. The challenge therefore is on how to identify the formal and informal audiences especially in non-western political cultures.

Very significantly, Wilkinson (2007) also advocated for some contextualization of the security environment or the region in order to appreciate the region’s security dynamics. In line with this, Balzacq (2005) goes further to point out the over-simplification, generalisation and universal application of the speech-act in securitization especially with regard to the idea of an audience disregarding differences in security environments; ‘including the context, the psycho-cultural disposition of the audience, and the power that both speaker and listener bring to the interaction’ (Balzacq, 2005; 172). Applying the concept of

securitization in non-western societies such as Africa will factor in the difference in political development before identifying the audiences. The issue of context is very important and in the context of Africa, the attention is focused on the neo-patrimonial statehood – patronage politics. Here neo-patrimonialism is explained as the hybrid system of leadership in which the formal legal bureaucratic model of authority mixes with the informal political ties in a power relations mainly characterized by patron-client favour for support exchange.

This article conceptualises an interface between the concept of securitization; the process of construction of security threats and the interface with neo-patrimonialism. It analyses the securitization processes among the political elites in neo-patrimonial statehood. It further stretches the conceptualisation of securitization beyond the original European security environment into other regions; for example, African statehood characterised by a blurred line between leader and state. The political elite for clarification stand for group of individuals who wield so much power and wealth at the corridors of political power. They can come from military, media, religious, corporate and bureaucratic background. They are intricately connected and control the decision making of the state.

This article builds on the classical literature on securitization and neo-patrimonialism, as well as subsequent works which focused on various elements of these concepts. It examines a few cases in West Africa in order to explain the securitization-neo-patrimonialism dynamics. The article seeks to make vital contributions to the literature in two major areas by suggesting: a) there is an absence of an institutionalised and non-personalised securitization framework in neo-patrimonial statehood; b) what is defined as a security threat is a function of the narrow threat perception of the neo-patrimonial states' leaders at national and sub-regional levels; and c) the Copenhagen School application of securitization ignores contextual differences in security environments and levels of statehood. Thus, theoretically, the article introduces a new securitization-neo-patrimonialism framework for security analysis outside Europe and the West, a framework based on a synthesis of the concepts of securitization and neo-patrimonialism.

Following a background overview of the development of securitization theory – considering critiques and application of its core ideas especially audience and context, the discussion will proceed to the political culture of neo-patrimonialism before synthesizing elements of

the two. There will be an empirical discussion of the application of securitization in the West African context. Specifically, the article will be empirically anchored on the intervention of the Economic Community of West African States in the crises that engulfed the two states of Liberia and Sierra Leone at the end of the Cold War in the 1990s. Considering that the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) was not *ab initio* a security arrangement but rather an economic organisation, it is important to find out what led to transformation, the creation of ECOWAS Monitoring Group (ECOMOG) and eventual intervention in the conflict areas; the power play among the leaders. What was the securitization process? Who was the audience in that context? And what role did neo-patrimonial political culture play in the process?

### **Theory of Securitization: Managing Audience and Context Problematique**

Securitization has been defined as a speech-act process ‘through which an inter-subjective understanding is constructed within a political community to treat something as an existential threat to a valued referent object and to enable a call for urgent and exceptional measures to deal with the threat’ (Buzan et al, 1998; 30, Buzan and Waever, 2003; 491). But the threat only becomes securitized ‘only if and when the audience accepts it as such’ (Buzan et al, 1998; 25). Through the speech-act process, an issue is tagged a security threat by a securitizing actor and through some rhetorical speech or persuasion an audience finds some resonance with the speech or argument and the issue is treated as a security threat requiring an emergency action to be contained. In other words, no issue is objectively a security issue but securitizing actor places recognition on it according to security perception. According to Williams (2003; 513) ‘in securitization theory, ‘security’ is treated not as an objective condition but as the outcome of a specific social process: the social construction of security issues’. The identity of the securitizing actor(s) is made clear – ‘political leaders, bureaucracies, governments, lobbyists, and pressure groups’ (Buzan et al, 1998; 40). It is easier to locate the actor and the audience in an established democracy or political order. The identity and roles of the audience are clearly known. But it is more complicated in non-democratic settings. This is because of the blurry line in the power relations among the political elite; the actors and their client followers and audiences. It is therefore important

to unpack the audience and context. But before doing that it is important to bring out few criticisms against the theory of securitization.

Since Barry Buzan and his colleagues introduced an innovation into security studies through the concept of 'securitization' (Buzan, 1993, Waever, 1995, Buzan et al, 1998), it has attracted both positive and negative comments. The project nurtured in Copenhagen, Denmark which McSweeney (1996) 'christened' the 'Copenhagen School' has become famous for its paradigm shift on security studies. It shifted security discourse from the traditional realist state-military-power perspective to other referent objects. The Copenhagen project has brought into focus several security threats and aided in security analysis of various regions of the world, especially Europe. Much as the contribution of the 'securitization concept' to security studies is appreciated, it is riddled with loopholes. The focus here will be more on those issues that this article seeks to address especially in the context of non-western security environment, particularly neo-patrimonial statehood in Africa.

In the first instance, there is serious issue with the idea of audience in the securitization process. In the same manner, the idea of audience as articulated by the Copenhagen School has been criticised as being under-theorized (see Leonard and Kaunert, 2010; 57-70). The point is that for a security actor to declare any threat a serious issue meriting a measure outside normal politics – exceptional and emergency approaches - the actor should be able to convince (perlocutionary effect) the public or an audience who will permit the speaker or accede to his argument. Balzacq (2010; 9) proposed that 'to persuade the audience (e.g. the public) that is, to achieve a perlocutionary effect, the speaker has to tune his/her language to the audience's experience'. On the surface this is very easy but when one considers the complexity of publics and differences in political orders, securitization in its simplistic form becomes harder to apply, especially in Africa. Williams (2008; 7) posited that 'this raises questions about who counts as a "significant audience" and how this idea should be applied to states or organizations that do not boast a functioning public sphere' or an established democratic decision process (Vuori, 2008; 68).

Concerned about this ambiguity as to who constitutes an audience and how to assess its security threat argument, Leonard and Kaunert (2011) made a profound contribution in reconceptualising this aspect of securitization concept. Whilst significantly advancing the

debate, it is simultaneously restricted to well-established liberal democracies. This article agrees with Vuori (2008), who applied securitization to non-democratic orders, but it shifts its focus to Africa which is inundated with neo-patrimonial, authoritarian statehood and regimes. This, according to Vuori (2008; 66), is very important in order to appreciate the idea of securitization; 'If Securitization Studies is to be an encompassing research programme, it should take into account security speech and politics in all types of political systems'.

The Copenhagen School of Security Studies ascribed a special position or role to the 'audience' in the securitization process. Buzan et al (1998; 30, 31) argued that 'securitization, like politicization, has to be understood as an essentially intersubjective process... securitization is intersubjective and socially constructed'. The emphasis is on the intersubjective character of the process of securitization. If it is intersubjective, it therefore requires a dialogue or a consensus for effectiveness. At one end of the spectrum is a securitizing actor and at the other end is an audience who accedes to the reasoning of the securitizing actor. Buzan et al (1998; 25) again argued that 'a discourse that takes the form of presenting something as an existential threat to referent object does not by itself create securitization – this is *securitizing move* but the issue is securitized only if and when the audience accepts it as such'. Other considerations of the audience can also be found in Buzan et al (1998; 34). Granted that securitization is accepted as speech-act process, they argued that 'the speech-act approach says only that it is the actor who by securitizing an issue – and the audience by accepting the claim – makes it a security issue'. In order to further strengthen the argument, Buzan et al (1998; 31) stated that 'successful securitization is not decided by the securitizer but by the audience of the security speech act'. It is not argued that the idea of an audience in the securitization process is not accepted, but as other analysts have argued (see for instance Balzacq, 2005; 173; McDonald, 2008; and Vuori, 2008) clarity is demanded in order to benefit security analysis of especially undemocratic regimes and uninformed public.

Buzan et al (1998; 40) submit that 'a *securitizing actor* is someone, or a group, who performs the security speech act. Common players in this role are political leaders, bureaucracies, governments, lobbyists, and pressure groups' (at least in advanced democracies). One



would expect that such attempt would apply to clarify who an audience is within the securitization framework. Leonard and Kaunert (2011) stepped in to clear the conceptual fog around the idea of audience in securitization analysis. According to Leonard and Kaunert (2011; 50)

‘The role of the audience in securitization processes remains significantly under-theorised in the Copenhagen School’s formulation of securitization theory. Although Buzan, Waever and de Wilde emphasise that securitization is an *intersubjective* process, in which the audience seemingly plays a crucial role, this concept remains rather vague and under-specified. How it could be operationalised in empirical studies is also far from clear’.

Leonard and Kaunert (2011) built their reconceptualization of the audience on a key suggestions by Balzacq (2005; 172-3) that securitization should not be interpreted wholly as a speech act but rather as a strategic practice amalgamating several ‘circumstances including the context, the psycho-cultural disposition of the audience, and the power that both speaker and listener bring to the interaction’. The speech act model presents securitization as a sustained strategic actions aimed at convincing a target audience to accept *based on what it knows about the world*. But Balzacq (2005; 172) proposes to recast this speech act model by elevating ‘securitization above its normative setting and in so doing ensconces it in the social context, a field of power struggles in which securitizing actors align on a security issue to swing the audience’s support toward a policy or course of action’. The idea here is that the actor has to find a platform or line of argument that will effectively resonate with or swing the audience in full of support of the intended line of action. Segregating these issues will make the securitization approach empirically more operational especially in West Africa.

Other suggestion came in form of Vuori’s (2008) proposition of possibility of multiple audiences depending on specific contexts and ‘specific socio-historical situations’ (Leonard and Kaunert, 2011; 61). This is very significant in the African context where there is the possibility of diverse allegiances, ethnic cleavages and interests. The audience during an inter-ethnic war in West Africa certainly will be different from the audience when issues of cross border crimes, illicit drugs and illegal weapons for instances are being securitized by

national governments or sub-regional body. Vuori (2008, 72) therefore submits that 'audiences depend on the function the securitization act is intended to serve'. It may also be difficult in societies where issues of religion and politics are intricately interwoven (Karyotis and Patrikios, 2010; 13). The audience may not necessarily be the public. It could also be members of government institutions and representatives whose political support is very important. Such support has been classified as formal support whilst the one from the public as moral support, which frequently is not enough to move an issue to the realm of *securityness* (see Balzacq, 2005; 185; Leonard and Kaunert, 2011; 62; and Roe, 2008). Beyond European security environment and far away from institutionalised democracies are clusters of security structures hugely influenced by political culture characterized by dynamics of favour-for-support, big man-small man power relations. This seriously affects the workings of securitization processes and makes the theory unworkable in its original format. The next section unpacks the concept of neo-patrimonialism and how it works.

### **Patrimonialism – Neo-patrimonialism continuum**

In an interwoven labyrinth of 'big man-small man' networks of favour for support, the political elite in Africa have monopolized both the tangible and intangible resources of the state to maintain their hold on power and define the security pattern of their individual countries. The preceding section dissected the body of the securitization framework especially as it relates to the securitizing actor and the audience. Borrowing from Leonard and Kaunert's (2011) contribution, the intention is to advance and stretch the frontier of the Eurocentric and under-theorized concept to benefit the discourse on African security in a setting of neo-patrimonial statehood: who frames the threats and to what extent the neo-patrimonial character of the state plays a role in securitization process in Africa, especially since the end of the Cold War? This section starts by discussing the idea of neo-patrimonialism and synthesizes it with securitization before moving on to operationalize the synergy.

There has been a significant effort on the part of the Africanists from the African divide to deny the influence neo-patrimonialism can have on the whole workings of the state (Mkandawire, 2008; 106-136) and an overstatement or distortion of the dynamics of the patrimonial system (Bayart et al, 1999; 131). Nothing can better explain the trend or

direction of a state's policy than its internal dynamics. Taylor (2010; 2) remarked that 'erroneous is the unwillingness to acknowledge that the state-society complex evident across many parts of sub-Saharan Africa has critical implications and a vital – possibly decisive – influence upon many aspects of the continent's international relations'. Falola (2006; 18) argued that the 'nature of the patron-client system in a country is necessary to understand the behaviour and activities of members of the political class and warlords'. Part of the reason for this disagreement is probably because the issue of patrimonialism has been painted in a negative light. It should be understood as an integral part of the African society that has been bastardized and capitalized on for personal aggrandizement by the political class.

The aim here is to explore this system that has been variously dubbed the 'politics of the belly' (Bayart, 1993; 228-259), the 'politics of belonging' (Chabal, 2009; 43-64), the 'state-society complex' (Taylor, 2010; 1-8) and the 'politics of regime survival' (Clapham, 1996; 4). What is significant in these works is their total recognition of the agency of African states in their international relations or their political development whilst the extent to which it affects the construction of security threats in Africa remains largely uncharted.

Patrimonialism therefore is a system of 'personal leadership on the basis of loyalties that do not require any belief in the ruler's unique personal qualification, but are inextricably linked to material incentives and rewards' (Guenther, 1968; 194-206). This is an adaptation of Max Weber's types of authority based on legal authority; traditional authority and charismatic authority (see Weber, 1947 especially 304-350). Without going into much detail, it will just highlight the essential elements of Weber's (1947) thesis and show how the concepts of authority apply to African states.

According to Weber (1947), legal authority is where the person in authority exercises power not because of his person but based on a legal document and/or agreement – for instance the constitution establishing the authority. The traditional authority on the other hand respects not any given agreement but is more representative of ancient traditions and is the custodian of the established culture. Obedience is not to the person but the traditions, precepts and the spirit of the ancestors. The third variant in the Weberian model of authority is charismatic which hinges on the natural charisma for leadership that the person

in authority (usually the chief) seems to possess. 'The chief, as the embodiment of the living community, the point of contact with its ancestral past, and the trustee of its generational future is usually surrounded by highly elaborate rituals that emphasize all or any combination of these sacral roles'(Levine, 1980; 659).

The patrimonial system of authority can accordingly be said to draw from a combination of the traditional and charismatic authority. The chief gains 'legitimacy' from his being a custodian of traditional ways of the people and a certain heroism he might have displayed in wars against the people's enemies. Instead of a bureaucratic staff, his staffs are drawn from his household members, slaves, personal retainers and also from his cronies who are beholden to him in a favour-for-support reciprocity. The pre-colonial patrimonial authority in Africa - whether headed by Shaka of Zulu kingdom, Osei Tutu of Ashanti confederation or other renowned rulers such as Othman dan Fodio and Samori - fits well into this 'big man-small man' arrangement. It must be recognized that the chief does not have the freedom to do as he pleases because he is bound under a certain unwritten constitutionalism that does not allow him to overstep his bound or else he would incur the wrath of the community and could be deposed. This description of authority under patrimonial system is significant because it illustrates that it is a system that has survived over the years. It was not a negative system *per se* and should not be mistaken for authoritarianism, exclusiveness or totalitarianism but part of the everyday life of the people. It has also evolved into different things for different people and has been equally bastardized (see Price, 1974; 172-204; Lemarchand and Legg, 1972; 149-178; Theobald, 1982; 548-559; Kaufman, 1974; 254-308).

It is equally noteworthy that patrimonialism is not restricted to Africa whether in its traditional pre-colonial form or in the post-colonial fashion. For example Weber (1947) identified the existence of such system in Japan, Middle East and even in feudal Europe. Roth (1968; 198) also suggested that behind the fabled charismatic appeal of president John F. Kennedy of America was actually a Kennedy 'clan' a clique kitchen cabinet, and his personal apparatus who were beholden to him in an intricate web of reciprocity. The same could also be said of Post-Cold War Russia the inheritor of much of the former Soviet politburo machinery which has survived to present day. In other words, every leadership of any government probably has a veneer of personal leadership arising from an old platform of patrimonialism whether in the advanced institutionalized bureaucracies or in the blurry

potpourri system of developing democracies. The argument is that patrimonialism in Africa has been practiced in an extreme form, thereby undermining the benefits of the system. In summary, patrimonialism in its default form is not a negative system. Secondly, it is part and parcel of the workings of all traditional societies – Africa, America, Asia and Europe. In other words, it is not restricted to Africa. Finally, its bastardization in Africa especially came as a result of ethnic and class consciousness originating from their colonial experiences.

The evolution of patrimonialism with a 'neo' prefix started in the 1980s with the works of Medard (1982) and Clapham (1985). It came to be seen as the corrupt and bastardized form of patrimonialism which was regarded as a critical part of African society which the ruling elite latched on for personal benefits once they are in power. Ever since then it has assumed a prominent place in the literature on African studies (Clapham, 1982; Bratton and Van de Walle, 1997; Chabal and Daloz, 1999; Van de Walle, 2001; William, 2003; Erdman and Engel, 2007; Chabal and Vidal, 2008; De Grassi, 2008; and Pitcher et al, 2009). While patrimonialism was seen in terms of social capital as a way of explaining political cohesion in Africa societies (Theobald, 1982; 555), neo-patrimonialism is 'regarded as a functional threat to the peaceful political development of African states and the development of societies in general' (Erdman, 2009; 97).

The salient feature of the neo-patrimonial system of authority is that the Weberian rational-legal bureaucracy is inconsequential. In other words, even though there are institutions and bureaucracies, they are personal tools in the hands of the ruler to wield his authority over the people. It is neo-patrimonial because it is a medley of tradition and modernity in which the Prince-leader controls the whole modern state apparatuses including the security sector in the same way the chief in the traditional authority in pre-colonial days would do. Any semblance of dichotomy between the public and private is a mere charade as 'these rulers bear the national synonym of sovereign statehood in the manner of *'l' Etat, c'est moi'* (Boas, 2001; 699). Kamuzu Banda was Malawi personified as Nkrumah was the embodiment of Ghana. Zaire (DRC) was the personal property of General Mobutu as Houphet Boigny was seen as 'father' of the people of Ivory Coast. The African variant of the Machiavellian Prince will not tolerate any opposition to the seat of state power as he uses the state's resources to securitize any semblance of opposition, control the military, the police, the judiciary and in some cases the media are seriously circumscribed and gagged while the constitution is

severely manipulated, all in the bid to ensure the survival of the 'big man' in the state house (see Clapham, 1996; 3 and Cammack, 2007; 604-5).

What lubricates the tool of neo-patrimonialism and keeps it functioning is the oil of resources, in the form of wealth accruing from the abundant natural resources in many of the post-colonial states in Africa under the control of individual rulers. Where a state is lacking in natural resources or the price slumps, the 'hand-out' – aid, loans and grants from foreign donor patrons – become a 'pull factor' towards a competition to control the state power in order to be in control of such funds. In both cases, the contracts, the mining licenses, oil blocks, and choice appointments are handed out to the patron's faithful 'servants' 'friends' (local and foreign), family members or people from his ethnic group (see McFerson, 2010;342-344) and for Chabal and Daloz (1999;81-87) that is the way Africa works. For Richards (1996; xviii),the Sierra Leone war as well as the ones in Liberia, Guinea Bissau, Congo DR, Cote d'Ivoire, and the restiveness in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria, are all 'a product of this protracted, post-colonial crisis of patrimonialism'. Let it be quickly reiterated that like traditional patrimonialism, the 'neo' version is not in any way restricted to post-colonial states of Africa. Taylor (2010; 3) and McFerson, (2010; 343) have noted that it can also be identified in other places such as Ukraine, North Korea, Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, Myanmar, Indonesia, Russia and various Latin American nations (see also, Lemarchand and Eisenstadt,1980; Clapham, 1982; Fattom,2002).

The impetus for the intricacies and dynamics of neo-patrimonialism in Africa lies in what Chabal (2009; 43-64) termed the 'politics of belonging', in which the kinship affiliation is very strong and the people always want to identify with where they come from. The abuse of this by political elite becomes an extreme manifestation of neo-patrimonialism. This can be evidenced from the cases of 'indigene and stranger', 'insider and outsider' politics in Africa and of course the ethnic favouritism pervading the political landscape of Africa. It can be safe to suggest that neo-patrimonialism in Africa is as a result of a struggle by a continent stuck between a need to find its route back to its identity and a need to benefit from the modernization and the wave of democratization especially after the end of the Cold War politics. Empirical cases will aid us in understanding the dynamics of neo-patrimonialism and securitization in Africa. The two interventions in West Africa (Liberia and Sierra Leone) by the ECOWAS community at the end of the Cold War in the 1990s are used here to bring out

the relationship. It is demonstrated that unlike the way securitization works in European security environment, the concept will have to be reconceptualised to fit neo-patrimonial statehood in Africa. The question of who the audience is in such context has to be defined. It is to be seen that the character of the audience also differs according to the context.

### **Empirical application: Liberia and Sierra Leone**

It was not a surprise when in 1990 ECOWAS, under the Nigerian leadership, created the ECOWAS monitoring group (ECOMOG) to intervene in Liberia in the early days of the wars in that country. There were arguments and criticisms against such a military move. Blaise Compaore of Burkina Faso argued for instance that 'ECOMOG did not conform to the constitutional legal requirement of ECOWAS' (Adebajo, 2002; 64-65; see also Wippman, 1993; 157-203). From earlier information about his relationships, it is not difficult to fathom where he was coming from. Given that there was no authorization anywhere in the protocols for such action in Liberia, why did the member states intervene? There were yes and no votes from the member states. The point is that the military action (securitization) was more political than based in law - and the politics is based on the interrelationships among the leaders in West Africa with biased interests. For instance, Compaore (see above) had equally become a 'special one' in the sub-region. Adebajo (2002; 64) again revealed that Compaore had a client-patron ties with Eyadema, President of Togo who had supported him when he gained power in Burkina Faso. Compaore reciprocated by mediating in Togo's internal crisis and sending troops to monitor Togolese elections in 1993. Mali and Niger had benefited from Compaore's 'good gesture' when he helped in resolving Tuareg challenges in the two countries. Remember the special relationship that Compaore and Boigny of Cote d'Ivoire shared – a relationship based on matrimonial ties. The support was extended to Charles Taylor and his National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPFL) (see Obi, 2009; Kromah, 2008; Kholbe, 2000; Adeleke, 1995; Adibe, 1997).

The regional security thinking and securitization processes drifted from the interests of the population of the community to those of individual leaders. According to Adibe (1997; 482)

'In this regard, in West Africa and much of Africa, diplomacy has really been about the politics of personality. In the case of Liberia, a complex web of personal ties and 'friendship' involving the principal actors in the conflict -

Samuel Doe, Charles Taylor, Ibrahim Babangida, Blaise Compaore and Jerry Rawlings, among others posed enormous challenges to the presumption of impartiality by ECOWAS’.

The clauses in the ECOWAS Treaty or the protocols could either be circumvented or abused to achieve those personal interests of the leaders. When Samuel Doe asked for assistance from President Babangida of Nigeria at the point when former’s regime was caving in, he did so believing first in the strength of their relationship. The intervention of ECOWAS could be argued to largely be a fall-out of this intersection of interpersonal conviviality and interests of individual states according to the security perceptions of the ‘big men’ at the top. This intricate and complex diplomacy neutralizes the common good agenda in the securitization of West African security issues. Accordingly Brown (1999; 11) suggested that

‘Looking at the players involved and the final score card, it appears that ECOWAS states overcame their differences in support of a common cause. In reality, preservation of the unique self-interests of the West African states propelled them to work together to resolve the Liberian crisis’.

Consider these instances: Mali became involved in ECOWAS’s effort in Liberia by sending troops. This was seen as a diversionary strategy by the President Alpha Omar Konare. Having succeeded the former leader Moussa Traore, Konare decided to send troops comprising those that were loyal to the Traore administration. In other words, it was a way of keeping them busy abroad instead of staying at home to cause trouble for Konare’s regime (see Keita, 1998; 22-23). Secondly, it was another attempt by a French-speaking state at balancing Nigeria’s (English speaking) hegemony in the sub-region. So Konare essentially was using his domestic security perception to approach the securitization of regional security crisis. Like Mali, Ibrahim Bare of Niger in 1996 came to power through a bloodless coup. Sending troops to Liberia was a ploy to keep the troops busy. There was relative equanimity in the north of the country following the settling of the Tuareg insurgency. There was nothing to keep the military busy. Considering that not all members of the Armed Forces supported Bare, it would be a security miscalculation to keep them at home (Brown, 1999; 15-16). There was a need to enhance the international image of the regime, having been criticized for violent overthrow of former regime.



It is interesting how regimes that came to power through illegal and unpopular means sent military help to places where the same thing was happening. According to Ofuatey-Kodjo (1994; 295) 'the notion that a group of states headed by military dictatorships have the right to intervene in another state in order to establish a democratic regime is grotesque'. Apart from sending help to rescue a friend in Liberia, Nigeria's Babangida was concerned about the effect of the crisis in the sub-region in terms of encouraging soldiers to do the same in other countries. Sierra Leone and Guinea had a significant number of men involved in the war in Liberia and there were also many Liberians living as refugees in these two countries and beyond including Ghana and Cote d'Ivoire. So it is argued that the countries and their leaders could only be concerned about how that would affect their regime security and not necessarily because of the securitization of sub-regional security issues. Furthermore, it has implications for the audience in the securitization process in that it is not the public that is the audience as would be expected in a democratic order. The audience instead is the fellow West African leaders and other political actors who need to be persuaded of every securitization move or extra political measure

The successes recorded by ECOMOG in Liberia encouraged the sub-regional leaders to try the same approach in Sierra Leone. The end of Cold War and its implications on global geopolitics helped to localize the security politics in the sub-region of West Africa. Starting from Liberia and extending to Sierra Leone, the sub-regional leaders faced a lack of adequate support from external patrons and thus articulated their security actions to manage the emerging security challenges by themselves. ECOWAS did not have any prior security mechanism to address security issues in Sierra Leone; the same way it did not have any before intervening in Liberia. It is argued that the processes of securitizing the issues that emerged in Sierra Leone and the subsequent securitization processes put in place for future security threats were influenced by the neo-patrimonial disposition and dynamics in the sub-region, rather than the larger security interest of the sub-region. It is important to bear in mind that the close-knit nature of the states in the sub-region means that what affects one state has spill-over effect on the other state. It is strategically wrong to ignore security development in one neighbouring state because they will definitely cause ripples (Bah, 2005; 1).

A brief overview of the events leading to the ECOWAS intervention in Sierra Leone will suffice here. A group of Revolutionary United Front (RUF) rebels sponsored by Charles Taylor in Liberia tried to overthrow the government of Joseph Momoh in Sierra Leone in March 1991 but did not succeed because of the assistance of external hands including Nigeria and a pro-government militia, the Kamajors. The government was eventually overthrown by Captain Valentine Strasser who eventually became president in 1992. Brig-General Bio overthrew Valentine in 1996 and organized an election that brought in Ahmad Tejan Kabbah as president. However on May 25<sup>th</sup> 1997, Kabbah himself was forced to flee to Guinea in a coup by Armed Forces Revolutionary Council (AFRC) led by Major Johnny Paul Koroma and supported by Sankoh and his RUF (McGregor, 1999; Berman and Sams, 2000; Bah, 2005; Gberie, 2005; Rashid, 2013). It was at this point that Nigeria intervened to rescue the situation. The Sierra Leonean crises definitely were serious security problems in the Mano River Basin and beyond. But how these were securitized and perceived by different individual regimes in the sub-region was interesting. Let us consider that ECOWAS member states put in place some protocols such as the protocol on conflict prevention, management and resolution; moratorium on small arms; protocol on democracy and good governance. There is also a protocol on free movement of persons in the sub-region.

The ambition of the framers of these protocols and many more on other salient security issues was to transform ECOWAS from a security complex to security community. These protocols may sound noble but they did not command unanimity of opinions and actions from the leaders of individual member countries in implementing them. It is from this angle that we will view the intervention of ECOWAS in Sierra Leone. The intervention was fraught with much controversy as the ideals and interests of leaders clashed. First of all, the intervention spearheaded by Nigeria was a move by Nigerian leader General Sani Abacha to reinstate his friend President Kabbah who had been forced to flee to neighbouring Guinea (Gberie, 2005; 112). Sierra Leone and Nigeria had concluded a bilateral defence agreement in 1997 which would provide training to the Sierra Leonean Army and presidential guard. About 900 Nigerian troops, a military training team and a battalion attached to ECOMOG were present before the coup that removed Kabbah (Berman and Sams, 2000; 112-113). Nigeria did not have any legality or authorization to intervene in Sierra Leone. The sub-region was just coming out from the Liberia crises and therefore had no institutionalized

framework for action in Sierra Leone. Nigeria simply pursued another ad hoc securitization measure; acting first before asking for ECOWAS approval; reminiscent of a dimension of securitization processes being ad hoc. Also it is suggested within securitization concept that

‘if by means of an argument about the priority and urgency of an existential threat the securitizing actor (in this context Nigerian leader) has managed to break free of procedures or rules he or she would otherwise be bound by, we are witnessing a case of securitization’ (Buzan et al, 1998; 25).

It could only be interpersonal neo-patrimonial interests that guided the action. In order to get ECOWAS approve the military action there were some sub-regional dynamics underpinning the for-and-against argument.

The approval for intervention to reinstate Kabbah did not come until about three months after Nigeria has already intervened and there were a lot of troubling issues. Experience in Liberia made Ghana and Cote d’Ivoire wary of another costly encounter in Sierra Leone. Also, considering that Liberia’s Charles Taylor and Burkina Faso were arming the RUF rebels, other ECOWAS members were doubtful of their commitment to the ECOWAS threat securitization moves. What is also a very important issue is that the Anglophone-Francophone divide and suspicion was pulling the fabrics of the security mechanism in the sub-region apart. Though the old man of Cote d’Ivoire politics, Houphouët-Boigny, was dead at the time of the crisis, the colonial hangover was still an issue to the ECOWAS members. There was palpable fear of Nigerian domination expressed by the members.

Of much more interest to the sub-region and even international community is the concern over the altruism of Nigerian leader in the intervention in Sierra Leone. Commentators (Olonisakin, 1998; McGregor, 1999; Berman and Sams, 2000; Rashid, 2013; Fawole, 2001, 2003) have queried the genuineness of the intention of Nigerian leader General Sani Abacha. This is worth interrogating, considering that Nigerian state was groaning under his military jackboot while he was making efforts to reinstate an overthrown democratically elected Tejan Kabbah of Sierra Leone. Nigeria was a pariah nation at that point and so Abacha’s strategy could be argued to be a way of seeking legitimacy and approval from the West. It cannot be dismissed that Abacha while trying to reinstate his friend to power was also using that as a strategy to distract the military at home and engage them abroad to

avoid the military trying copy the situation in Sierra Leone. Furthermore, it is also suggested that Abacha did have some commercial interests in Sierra Leonean mineral resources. Berman and Sams (2000; 117) noted that 'when Kabbah had first come to power, Abacha had reportedly approached the Sierra Leonean authorities for mineral concessions'. In this context, the securitizing actors were the neo-patrimonial leaders in West Africa. The threat was the issue that was disturbing one of their fellow leaders led by Nigerian Abacha. But the issue was perceived differently according to their personal interests. The audience was the member leaders that needed to be carried along before any military action could take place. It was not the citizens at home that demonstrated the narrowness and failure in the securitization politics.

There is no doubt that West African leaders have made some efforts to transform the sub-region into a security community. The experience in the Sierra Leonean and Liberian interventions however revealed the narrowness in their threat perception. There is certainly a lot of securitization processes going on but it is argued that they are heavily clogged by neo-patrimonial sentiments and calculations by the leaders. The processes of securitization are at best personal, dependent on the interests of the patron leaders and at worst do not consider the security interests of larger West African populace. The security architecture or processes of securitization are not independent of individual countries or leaders.

## **Conclusion**

The article properly brought out the logic of securitization process – there was an issue, a securitizing actor, an emergency extra political measure and an audience to be persuaded. It demonstrated the dynamics of power play among the political elite in a neo-patrimonial setting. It was an effort aimed at taking securitization outside the security borders of Europe or advanced democracies – a construction of a nexus between securitization and neo-patrimonialism.

Considering that ECOWAS was not initially a security outfit it is interesting to see how it managed the crises that threatened the sub-region of West Africa in the 1990s. The argument and counter argument among the leaders in West Africa clearly showed the difference in their threat perception and displayed the neo-patrimonial power

relations at the forefront of their consideration before the interventions in Liberia and Sierra Leone.

Whereas securitization theory in its original format failed to clearly identify audiences and contextual differences in the security environment, the article has provided new insights. The emergency measures in the intervention went through the rhetorical process by the Nigerian Head of State convincing an audience composed of his fellow leaders in West Africa, and not necessarily the general public. Finally, the argument was developed that: (1) issues in neo-patrimonial settings are securitized according to the threat perception of a narrow circle of elites, (2) thus, for securitization theory to benefit non west security environments, differences in contexts must be taken into consideration.

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